



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR
Amanda M. Dewey

COUNCIL MEMBERS
Jodie A. Kulpa-Eddy (Mayor Pro Tem)
Christopher S. Brittan Powell
Jason W. Papanikolas
Ethan D. Sweep

Worksession Minutes November 16, 2020 | 7:00 pm

This meeting was held by videoconference due to the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency. The meeting was broadcast on Berwyn Heights cable TV channels and streamed on the Town website. Residents were given the opportunity to join the meeting via Zoom and comment by telephone and email.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Amanda Dewey, Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Councilmembers (CMs) Christopher Brittan-Powell, and Ethan Sweep. Jason Papanikolas had an excused absence. Also present were Town Manager (TM) Laura Allen, Town Clerk Kerstin Harper, Pepco Governmental & External Affairs Manager Tony Ruffin, Campus Community Connections Director Andrew Fellows, and Green Team member Genevieve deMessieres.

1. Announcements

Mayor Dewey made announcements regarding the worsening COVID-19 pandemic and new restrictions put into place by Prince George's County, including smaller gatherings, reduced restaurant capacity and mask mandate. All residents were encouraged to consider smaller holiday gatherings and to be as safe as possible.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy announced the passing of Mike Miller, Ruatan Street, and Carol Cottone, 60th Avenue.

2. Approval of the Agenda

MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved to approve the agenda. CM Sweep seconded. The agenda was adopted 4 to 0.

3. Presentations

Pepco presentation: Mayor Dewey welcomed Pepco Governmental Affairs Manager Tony Ruffin for a presentation on Pepco's recent streetlight filing with Maryland's Public Service Commission (PSC). Mr. Ruffin said Pepco made a filing with the PSC in October to seek approval for its planned conversion of the current High-Pressure Sodium (HPC) and Mercury Vapor (MV) lights to smart LED lights. The initiative originated from Pepco's discussions with local governments in its service area, which have expressed their interest in converting to LED lights. The new lights will reduce energy consumption by 60% - 80%, have longer life expectancy and less maintenance costs. They also have smart nodes to report when a light is out or not working correctly. Deployment of smart LED lights will occur over a 5-year period at no upfront cost to municipalities. This does not include additional lights a municipality may want to install to illuminate dark areas.

Mr. Ruffin continued with an overview of the standard LED streetlight offerings, all of which come in a range of wattages and adjustable color temperatures. In response to Councilmembers' questions, Mr. Ruffin said:

- Smart nodes are electronic devices that connect the light fixture with Pepco's computer system to allow for the sending and receiving of data.
- Pepco does not have a large inventory of specialty lamps to match the particular ornamental style of a community. Rather, it offers a limited set of lighting options from which they can choose.
- Generally, municipalities choose one style for all their streetlights. But Pepco will work with cities that want different lamps for a particular area, such as a main street.
- College Park and Hyattsville have started the LED conversion process. Berwyn Heights could observe their new lights in action.
- So far, customer have reported a positive experience with LED conversion due to Pepco's collaborative approach.
- Pepco will give demonstrations of the LED lights if desired so that customers can better understand what wattage they want.
- Pepco's new streetlights offer light pollution controls, such as shields and timers, and are compliant with American Medical Association (AMA) and Dark Skies guidelines.
- All-purpose LED streetlights generally have some light shining to the sides and upward, but custom shields can be installed to prevent lights shining into residential homes.

Mr. Ruffin also responded to questions about tree trimming and removal. He said he had a good dialogue with Mayor Dewey and TM Allen about the Town's goals for tree trimming and removal. It was agreed to regularly engage on the subject. Mr. Ruffin then responded to questions submitted prior to the meeting:

- Pepco's 75' restriction for planting shade trees near powerlines is based on Arbor Day Foundation recommendations and PSC regulations, in particular Rule RM 43. Tree contractors exercise some independent judgement on tree trimming but mostly follow established policy.
- Burying powerlines is very expensive. As a regulated utility, Pepco would likely not be permitted by PSC to recover the full cost through rate increases. Additionally, the cost of undergrounding lines in one community would be borne by all Pepco customers, which may cause pushback. Therefore, Pepco generally does not bury existing overhead lines unless necessary for safety reasons.
- Over the last decade, Pepco has worked to overcome a reputation for unreliable service and frequent outages. Tree trimming is part of line maintenance to ensure reliability of service.
- Pepco controls vegetation under its powerlines, including shade trees, but works with SHA and local jurisdictions who may control the right of way near the power lines. When trees are removed Pepco replants smaller trees that will not impact the lines and encourages communities to do so as well.
- Pepco recommends not planting trees within 75' of power lines but will not enforce the rule on private property. It will, however, remove vegetation on its property that could impede access to its lines, including community gardens.

Mayor Dewey said that the Arbor Day Foundation appears to recommend a 50' distance of shade trees from power lines and asked if Pepco can clarify the basis for the 75' guidance. MPT Kulpa-Eddy said that she left messages for Pepco about the recent Berwyn Heights tree trimming project but never received a reply. She used a telephone number provided on a Pepco notice to Berwyn Heights residents. Mr. Ruffin said he will check on both issues and follow up.

Campus Community Connections (C3) update: Andrew Fellows, UMD Community & Outreach Program Manager, gave an overview of the C3 program and an update on 10 projects Berwyn Heights submitted for collaboration with the University of Maryland 2017. Mr. Fellows said he is leading the

University's program, now in its 5th year, to engage long term with its surrounding communities by providing academic research and expertise to help them solve problems related to sustainability and resiliency. At the same time, UMD students are given the opportunity to work on real world problems while serving the C3 member communities.

Berwyn Heights projects fall into 2 categories: community engagement and municipal sustainability. This year, UMD students worked on the following projects, some of which were interrupted by COVID-19 shutdowns:

- Improve the community's engagement with Pepco over the long term.
- Increase volunteerism in the Town using data science.
- Find a site in northern Prince George's County for composting organic waste thus diverting it from going into a landfill,
- Reduce flooding by using County data on flooding to pinpoint flood prone areas.
- Reduce pollution of the Anacostia watershed by improving management of stormwater runoff.

Other projects on Berwyn Heights' list that benefitted from student work include:

- removal of invasive species at Lake Artemesia;
- Improving environmental literacy of PGCPs students through outreach programs at the Schmidt Outdoor Education Center;
- Increasing the tree canopy by exploring the idea of Berwyn Heights as an arboretum and engaging with Pepco about tree trimming;

Berwyn Heights also collaborates with the University on:

- Smart Cities demand response initiative to conserve energy during peak demand periods;
- Greenbelt Road Corridor transformation;
- Good Neighbor Day.

In response to Councilmembers' questions, Mr. Fellows said he was not aware of a M-NCPPC meeting regarding planned streetscape improvements along Rt. 193 in Adelphi, but the University is engaged with the Purple Line Corridor Coalition to ensure that streetscape improvements are benefitting the impacted communities, including in Langley Park and Adelphi. Berwyn Heights can continue to support the C3 program by refining projects and guiding students in their research.

4. Discussion Items

Tree ordinance: Mayor Dewey said this item arises from work done by the Green Team/ Shade Tree Board over the last few years to develop ways to protect and increase the Town's tree canopy. As a Tree City, USA, Berwyn Heights is required to fund urban forest initiatives at a rate of \$2 per capita. The Green Team has now developed a framework for a tree ordinance that seeks to address the goals of 1) tracking tree removals, 2) incentivizing residents not to remove shade trees for reasons other than safety, 3) educating residents on the benefits of the tree canopy and 4) providing an alternative funding structure for the Town's forestry budget.

The proposed framework would require residents to notify the Town when they plan to remove a big shade tree, provide its location, and reason for removal. Residents would then be sent educational materials and an application to remove said tree. A fee would be charged as part of the application if the tree is removed for aesthetic or convenience reasons, but not if they pose a safety hazard. The receipts would be used to fund the Town's urban forest budget instead of general revenue.

In discussion the following comments were made:

- Ordinance should spell out the enforcement mechanism for tree removals.
- Ordinance might include provision for planting new trees when a mature tree is removed.
- Fee waivers might include removal of low value trees, e.g. unattractive trees with few leaves.
- Ordinance should identify persons/ experts who can judge which trees are to be removed for safety reasons.
- Homeowners might be provided educational materials recommending tree species for this area.
- Leaf collection season might be extended to collect leaves that drop late.
- Grants might be provided to help eligible property owners with leaf collection.
- Fee amounts for tree removals should not be ‘punitive’ but large enough to be able to fund beneficial initiatives.

Mayor Dewey summarized the Council appears to generally support the framework, but would like more details on enforcement mechanisms, fee amounts and possible coordination with other communities. Discussion of a tree ordinance will continue at future worksessions.

Walkable, Bikeable Berwyn Heights Task Force recommendations: Mayor Dewey explained last year the Council appointed a task force to study options for making the Town more pedestrian and bicycle friendly. The WBBH Task Force worked hard to produce a list of recommendations that was presented to the Council in a final report in February 2020. Subsequently, the Town asked staff for input to help prioritize the recommendations and to start implementation.

TM Allen said staff identified the following items as top priorities:

- Adding ‘don’t block the box’ signage at the intersection of Pontiac and Edmonston Road.
- Adding 4-way stop signs at the intersection of Berwyn Road and Ruatan Street to include the Sports Park parking lot.
- Adding a 3-way stop sign at Berwyn Road and 57th Avenue.
- Installing a raised crosswalk and/ or flashing lights on Berwyn Road at Indian Creek Trail to alert vehicle traffic to pedestrians approaching the roadway.

TM Allen continued that the Council appropriated \$30,000 in FY 2021 for WBBH improvements. The items above can probably be completed for less than \$5,000. More expensive projects will only be considered after the New Year when the Council has a better idea if revenues come in as projected. Cost savings may be realized if several small projects are bundled and done at the same time.

In discussion, Councilmembers proposed additional projects to start with:

- Completing crosswalk striping.
- Adding accessible ramps to sidewalks, i.e. at Pontiac Street and Edmonston Road.

Susan Jones, Pontiac Street, commented that additional stop signs are a good idea but that there should be better enforcement to prevent drivers from going through them. Council agreed and will have a separate discussion about stop sign enforcement and speed limits at another worksession. Council further agreed to authorize TM Allen to move forward with the above items after providing additional information on raised crosswalks and flashers for the Indian Creek trail crossing.

Council Rules update: TM Allen explained that CM Brittan Powell requested discussing the preparation and approval of Council meeting minutes covered in Council Rule 2. In addition, she proposes the Council consider adopting the process of a ‘consent agenda,’ which allows a group of items that are non-controversial or administrative in nature, to be approved in one motion. Samples of different types of minutes and consent agenda were provided in the background documents.

The Council discussed the Town Council minutes. The following points were made:

- Editing draft minutes via e-mail is preferable to editing orally at a meeting.
- With the availability of video recordings of Council meetings online, shorter action minutes would suffice.
- Council Rule 2 B 1(c) provides that “minutes should include key points made in discussions, attributed to individual Councilmembers, if appropriate, sufficient to enable someone reading the minutes to determine the reasoning behind a particular decision.”
- Minutes in the current style provide an overview and context of Council discussions that allow for a quick review of what occurred at a particular meeting.
- Currently, many residents read minutes in the Bulletin and online and refer to them when providing input to the Council.
- Video recordings are not captioned and therefore not accessible for the hearing impaired.

The Council discussed the consent agenda. The following comments were made.

- Ordinances and resolutions are not usually approved under the consent agenda. But some resolutions may be of such routine, uncontroversial nature to be placed on a consent agenda.
- If any Councilmember wants to discuss an item that is on the consent agenda in detail, it can be pulled out and discussed separately
- While theoretically possible, it is unlikely the consent agenda would be used to stifle discussion.

Mayor Dewey summarized that the Council agrees on adopting the email editing and consent agenda process in the Council Rules. TM Allen was requested to make the changes in the Council Rules to be presented for Council action at a future meeting.

Bond bill update: TM Allen said the Town requested \$145,000 in funding from the General Assembly last January through a legislative bond initiative request, otherwise known as a bond bill, for roof repairs, motion sensors, and elevator refurbishment at the Town Center. The Town received only \$50,000 in funding but there is an opportunity to appeal. The funds received will pay for the roof repairs and the motion sensors, but not the elevator. A remaining balance of \$28,000 could be spent on other smaller projects in the Town Center, such as upgrading the electrical wiring, repairing the windows or purchasing new chairs. The Council is requested to state their preferences.

Councilmembers agreed that refurbishing the elevator is a priority if additional money can be secured from the legislature either through an appeal or a new bond bill. Among the smaller projects, chair replacement should be considered as it was discussed at length during the FY 2021 budget process.

TM Allen will obtain quotes for the small projects mentioned above in order for the Council to make an informed decision on spending bond bill funds.

5. Department Reports

Mayor Dewey reiterated appeals to comply with the stricter COVID-19 protocols adopted to deal with the resurgence in cases. Berwyn Heights Police continues to keep residents safe and educate businesses on COVID compliance. Anyone with questions or concerns about the pandemic can call the Prince George’s County COVID hotline (301-883-6627). BHPD will set up a mailbox at the station for children to send letters to Santa by November 30.

Recreation Council President Susan Jones was present to discuss plans for a virtual Christmas Tree Lighting celebration to consist of several musical numbers, the tree lighting and Zoom visits with KHarper

Santa and with neighbors. Mayor Dewey will assist with production of a video that will be aired on YouTube and BHTV.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy reported on several meetings she plans to attend, including a forum on local government budgets during COVID, a National League of Cities virtual conference and meetings of Town committees. She thanked everyone who participated in the virtual Team Trivia Night, which received many good reviews.

TM Allen reported for the Administration Department that the County has agreed to hold a meeting to discuss the reallocation of funds received through the CARES Act.

CM Brittan-Powell reported that the Code Department remains on top of things and handled a couple of awkward situations.

CM Sweep reported that the Public Works Department is endeavoring to collect all leaf piles that have been deposited along the roads and reminded residents that there will be no trash collection during the Thanksgiving holidays. He also reiterated the importance of remaining socially distant to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and listed several nearby testing sites where people can find out if they have been infected.

Laura Knutson, Edmonston Road, commented that she was stuck at a COVID testing site for two hours while the site ran out of tests.

6. Town Council Schedule

The Council reviewed the upcoming schedule. No changes were made.

7. Citizen Comments

There were none.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk